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In late June, CASEL and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) published a brief, Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning: Next Steps for States, which offers recommendations to states about how to assess social and emotional learning (SEL) in their accountability and improvement systems. Key recommendations for states:

- *Support measures of students' social and emotional competence for local use.*
- *Include measures of school climate, supports for SEL, and related outcomes in statewide reporting systems.*
- *Provide districts with well-validated measurement tools.*
- *Offer resources and technical assistance for data analysis and professional learning.*

A follow-up webinar generated multiple questions from the field, which were addressed by LPI's Hanna Melnick and CASEL's Jeremy Taylor, with additional insights provided by Heather Hirsch (Minnesota Department of Education) and Vickie Blakeney (Renton, Wash., School District). Excerpts from the webinar follow.

Where can I find high-quality measurement tools?

Melnick: Appendix 4 of the original [report](#) on which this brief was based suggested a number of school climate tools, including some developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) for the U.S. Department of Education and the California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey.

Taylor: AIR's [Ready to Assess Toolkit](#) also highlights some surveys. Later this year the [Assessment Work Group \(AWG\)](#) that CASEL is managing will publish a guide to SEL competency assessments. It will profile current assessments that are valid and reliable as well as offer advice on how to select measures and use the data to improve instruction. (More below, including how to get on the AWG's mailing list.)

What criteria should we use to identify climate measures?

Melnick: We suggest states look at: How likely are the data to be actionable and used to improve instruction? For what purpose is the measure being used? How likely is the measure to yield consistent, reliable data? How rigorously has it been tested beforehand? And can it meaningfully differentiate between schools and subgroups of students?

Are there ready-made free surveys to help schools and districts plan for school improvement?

Taylor: CASEL has a couple of implementation tools, including our [District Theory of Action](#). The Theory of Action is currently being revised to pay more explicit attention to adult SEL, equity supports, and the integration of SEL into academic instruction. It is still a good starting point.

How can tools be used or misused for accountability?

Melnick: We agree with the California CORE Districts' caution to use assessments as a flashlight, not a hammer to shame or blame kids, teachers, families, or schools. We need to use assessments to understand root causes. If a student scores low on a measure of growth mindset, dig beneath the surface. Have teachers ask students why. Maybe they never had the proper academic scaffolding or experienced success before. States should be focused on high-quality professional learning that supports SEL and school climate and culture, sustained over time.

Taylor: Use SEL assessments to inform systemic improvements to instruction, culture, and climate, not to evaluate individual students. Adjust your practice based on the data. At the school and district levels, use the data to help plan your professional learning, allocate supports, and help close any disparities.

What are the best ways to use universal screeners?

Taylor: It depends on what is meant by the term "screener." We do not recommend using SEL competence measures to identify (or "screen") kids who are exhibiting emotional and/or behavior problems in order to refer them to additional services. Emotional/behavioral problems and SEL competence are not two ends of the same spectrum, and there are already measures available that were explicitly developed to identify emotional/behavioral problems, so it is better to use those.

However, some people use the term "screener" as a shorthand term for any brief measure that can be administered quickly and easily. In that case, brief SEL competence measures could be effectively used in a variety of ways, including by teachers to inform their instructional planning by getting a snapshot of their class,

STATES LEADING THE WAY

Two participants in CASEL's [Collaborating States Initiative](#) shared their experiences with SEL assessments.

Heather Hirsch said Minnesota is fortunate to have a bullying prevention law that requires evidence-based SEL work at schools. To support districts, the state worked with CASEL, Nick Yoder (AIR), and about 50 stakeholders to develop grade-level SEL competencies. They subsequently worked with over 100 stakeholders from the state and across the country on implementation and assessments [guidance](#), which includes recommended processes, key questions, and tools for school districts.

Vickie Blakeney brings vast experience based on her time in Anchorage, including work on the district's widely used SEL [standards and grade-level rubrics](#). She also led the SEL efforts for Nevada, which included embedding the SEL competencies first developed by Washoe County into the state's climate scale. She agrees that SEL measures are most valuable when teachers self-assess their own classroom and then provide supports based on the findings.

or by schools and districts to determine where additional support may be needed in the system (e.g., through professional development or implementing SEL programming).

How can we train educators to use these SEL measures?

Melnick: There are challenges at both the preservice and inservice levels. Inservice development should help teachers choose targeted learning goals and then give them concrete strategies for improving instruction. An explicit SEL curriculum helps, but it's not enough. Teachers and staff also need to create a welcoming environment, make their lessons culturally relevant, and regularly recognize and celebrate students' successes. LPI will release a report this summer on how to integrate SEL into academics (contact information below).

How does equity fit in?

Taylor: If states are using climate surveys under ESSA, they need to be disaggregating the data by subgroup and identifying the root causes that help explain the responses. Kids of different races and ethnicities have different senses of belonging and safety. Educators need to take a hard look at how their systems inadvertently contribute to these disparities and then fully support efforts to close the gaps.

Additional Resources

[Download the brief](#) and [view the webinar](#). Feel free to share these materials with your colleagues.

CASEL

[SEL Assessment Work Group website](#)

SEL Assessment Work Group [Collaborator Network](#) (Join to stay informed and contribute to the group's progress)

SEL Assessment Work Group [weekly blog](#)

CASEL District Theory of Action [Implementation Rubric](#)

School and Classroom SEL [Walkthrough Protocol](#) (Created by a CASEL partner district; requires registration, but is free):

CASEL [District Resource Center](#) (More than 500 implementation resources; requires registration, but is free)

Learning Policy Institute

Download reports and blogs, including:

[Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in the Context of New Accountability](#)

[Measuring What Matters: Leveraging ESSA to Foster Social and Emotional Learning](#)

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American Institutes for Research

[Tool Kit for SEL Assessment: Are You Ready to Assess Social and Emotional Development?](#)

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